

## Stress and keeping the bugs at bay.....

Have you noticed that invariably you get ill, after a significant trauma or stress, either emotional or physical, has passed? Do you know why? Is it to do with the immune system or something else do you think?

We all need certain types of stress – nervous system – sympathetic and non-sympathetic – one speeds up and one slows down. A little bit of stress is good. Short-term stress, or the “fight or flight response”, gives us the energy, speed, and concentration necessary to get out of sticky situations. Prolonged stress, however, is not something our body is meant to deal with. One part of the body that is particularly susceptible to the effects of chronic stress is the immune system.

### The Stress Response

The hypothalamus, a tiny pea-sized gland deep within the brain, is responsible for initiating the hormonal cascade of the stress response. Communicating through neural impulses and the release of hormones, the hypothalamus alerts the adrenal glands to jump into action.

The adrenal glands lie on top of the kidneys and can release massive amounts of hormones very quickly. The two most important hormones it releases in response to stress are adrenaline and cortisol. Adrenaline causes blood pressure and heart rate to increase, speeding the delivery of oxygen to the muscles. Cortisol causes blood sugar levels to rise as well as improves the brain’s ability to utilize glucose. Cortisol also has the ability to suppress immune, digestive, and reproductive function.

Once the stressful situation has passed the hypothalamus and adrenal glands respond by decreasing the amount of hormones they release, allowing heart rate, blood pressure, and the function of suppressed systems to be restored to normal.

Some kinds of stress - like continual stress - can prevent quick down-regulation of the stress response

The function of the immune system to keep foreign organisms and objects out of the body.

There are several organs that make up the immune system:

- Bone marrow
- Thymus
- Spleen
- Lymph nodes

The immune system organizes its activities based on how much and what parts of it are needed. Cortisol in particular, can affect this organization, causing the suppression of some parts of the immune system while allowing others to run rampant.

Did you know there is no such thing as stress? It’s simply a subconscious reaction in our brains – an internal reaction to an external force. Why do we get stressed? Our subconscious minds tell us there is something wrong with a particular situation – and its something that we aren’t used to, and believe we have no strategy

to deal with – so we panic. Fear of failure, fear of what others will say? What will happen if we don't do it? It's all to do with our subconscious mind. It works at 40million bits a second our conscious mind works at 40 bps so you can see how powerful our subconscious mind is!

Here is a fact – 95% illness is caused by stress – 100% of stress is caused by negative emotion. So, how often do we get ill when we are feeling positive?

So how can we keep well – by keeping positive and using “mood food”. **Mind**, the mental health organization say the best foods to eat are the most brightly coloured foods – whilst we may want a quick fix with bread, pasta, chocolate – it gives us an instant high – what it also does is put pressure on the pancreas to produce more insulin to break down the excess sugars in the body caused by the above.

Any food that is processed in an shape of form will, by its very processing, have increased levels of salt, sugar and additives – these put added pressure on the body as all the nutrients the body needs are in plentiful supply in unaltered, unprocessed foods, like meat, fish, vegetables, fruit and pulses. Why do you need anything else? To give you an indication of how foods have been messed about with over the years, let's take a look at milk. A generation ago, an average cow produced 9 litres of milk a day – do you know how much it can produce now? 56 litres. Yes, I said 56!!! And you know how? Feed that the cows are fed on unfortunately contain growth hormones – synthetic chemicals get passed on to you when you drink it! Is it any wonder why we all get toxic!

So then, without getting too depressed, let's take a typical food we all generally love which we can make ourselves and see just how good for us it can be! By that I mean CURRIES! Don't we just love them? Let me talk you through some of the usual ingredients in a curry and how good they are for us!

**Garlic** - nature's finest antibiotic! We believe it was first cultivated 5,000 years ago, Today, there is rapidly increasing world-wide interest in garlic, and the number of scientific studies performed every year is increasing exponentially. These studies have supported the idea that the regular consumption of garlic can reduce blood pressure, blood cholesterol levels, act as an inhibitor to the overgrowth of pathogenic organisms in the body, such as *Candida albicans*, be useful as a worm medicine, and have a number of other beneficial effects.

**Turmeric** is a wonder spice. In India it has been revered for its healing properties and used as a daily supplement, turmeric has many medicinal properties and is an anti-inflammatory agent to treat a wide variety of conditions, including flatulence, jaundice, menstrual difficulties, , toothache, bruises, chest pain, and colic. Because of its effects on enzyme related to inflammation, turmeric may have the same mode of action as anti-inflammatory medicines. It is used for cuts and burns and is known as an antiseptic and an antibacterial and for ulcers in the stomach.

**Cardamom** - A member of the ginger family, cardamom is an ancient spice, native to India. It is used worldwide in desserts, vegetables, curries and pilaf rice dishes. These aromatic seeds contain an oil that helps to stimulate digestion and relieve flatulence. To help relieve indigestion, mix a handful of crushed seeds in a half-cup of water with some ginger root. Bring to a simmer, and then add a little warm milk and honey.

**Cinnamon** - This warming spice is taken from the dried inner bark of a tropical tree to form the cinnamon sticks used in cooking. It is a common ingredient in toothpaste, mouthwashes and chewing gum. Cinnamon has health boosting compounds including eugenol, which is used to relieve pain and cinnamaldehyde, which has sedative properties. It is also useful for improving the circulation and has anti-inflammatory and blood thinning properties. Research shows that it may also help to lower blood sugar levels and so may be useful in the treatment of type 2 diabetes. It is a delicious, fragrant spice.

**Cloves** - Cloves are the unopened buds of an evergreen tree. Clove oil is well known as a treatment for toothache, and its antiseptic properties make it an excellent mouthwash. The main ingredient in the oil is eugenol which is anti-inflammatory and can help ease the stiffness and pain associated with arthritis. It is a warming spice which can help reduce congestion and stimulate digestion. To drink this spice as a tea, pour a cup of boiling water on to 1 teaspoon of cloves and steep for 10 minutes.

**Cumin** - Cumin dates back to Old Testament times, originating in the Mediterranean but now grown in India, China, Indonesia and Japan. It is a member of the carrot family and looks and smells like caraway seed. It is traditionally used in Asian and Middle Eastern cooking for curries, chillies, stews and breads. It is a good source of iron and manganese and is thought to help digestion and bloating. Make cumin tea by steeping 1 teaspoon of seeds in 1 pint of boiling water.

**Ginger** - Dating back more than 5000 years, ginger is an essential ingredient in Asian and Indian cooking. Ginger contains antioxidants and so can help protect against disease. It can help calm spasms and reduce flatulence in the digestive system. It is an excellent treatment for nausea associated with travel sickness, pregnancy and hangovers. Ginger tea can be made by adding a few slices to hot water. Try chewing on a little piece of the root to help with digestive problems.

**Lemon grass** is widely used as a herb in Asian cuisine. It has a citrus flavour and can be dried and powdered, or used fresh. It is commonly used in teas, soups, and curries. Research also shows that lemon grass oil has antifungal properties. Lemongrass has many good properties such as healing a headache, muscle and joint pain, nerve pain, rheumatism, sore throat, irritable bowel syndrome, Gastroenteritis, stomach pain, flatulence, diarrhea, stomach pain, irregular menstruation, bad breath, increases appetite, heals swollen gums, toothache.. It's good to warm the body.

And finally – how about Chillies! Since ancient times, chillies, both fresh and in the form of cayenne pepper, have been used by healers to cure a variety of ailments. They have been used externally to relieve pain and internally to cure anything from yellow fever to the common cold. The list of medicinal properties ascribed to the chilli include the following:

- Stimulant
- Tonic
- Sialagogue<sup>1</sup> – promotes the flow of saliva
- Alterative<sup>2</sup> - Facilitates a beneficial change in the body - to help the body's drive to restore itself to normal health.
- Rubefacient<sup>3</sup>
- Carminative<sup>4</sup> Prevents gas forming in the intestines and also assists in expelling it.
- Anticoagulant<sup>5</sup>
- Digestive

The active ingredient in hot red peppers is a compound called *capsaicin*, which gives it that unique sting. *Capsaicin* ointments have been found to relieve the pain of arthritis and shingles when applied externally, and, taken internally, capsaicin triggers the release of endorphins in the brain, which has a pain relieving effect similar to that of morphine.

The health-promoting properties of this plant are not confined to its pain relieving properties. A single pepper has been found to contain a full day's supply of beta carotene and nearly twice the recommended daily allowance for vitamin C, which makes the chilli an invaluable food in the fight against cancer and heart disease. Chillies may also help in weight loss by speeding up the metabolism. After eating hot peppers people tend to perspire, this is a sign that their metabolism is increasing and that food will be dealt with more efficiently.

One fascinating fact about *Capsicum frutescens* is that in Mexico, where people eat hot chillies as part of their regular diet, their bodies get thoroughly saturated with *capsaicin*. It is said that if a Mexican happens to die out on the prairies, the vultures will not touch the body because the flesh is too spicy for their taste.

So there you go! One of our most favourite foods is also good for us! What tends to make it bad, is the excessive use of oil or butter when making it – so don't use it!

That aside, I'm also here to voice a slightly different approach to illness in the body. You know when we have a trauma and some people get ill afterwards – is that the body making a mistake, or the body healing? Is disease meaningless or meaningful? What do you think?

Well, I'm currently studying a new form of therapy called Meta Medicine – this basically scientific proof that illness is a healing crisis which arises out of a trauma or conflict that happens to us. Once the crisis is over, the body relaxes and then starts to heal. Check out [Meta-Medicine.com](http://Meta-Medicine.com)!

Our brains are split roughly into 4 areas:

Brain stem - covers our basic survival and information – breathing, digestion, elimination, reproduction

Cerebellum – covers our nurturing and protection

Cerebral Medulla – covering our skeleton – self worth and identity

Cerebral Cortex – the walnut on the outside – which is our social and territorial interaction.

It can be clinically and scientifically proven through CT scans which show the various areas of the brain, that when we perceive a threat to ourselves for which we have no strategy to deal with, we go into a conflict shock. Once we get over that conflict and our body starts to heal, we often experience a “healing crisis” which is where our colds, flu and fevers come in.

The next time you get a cold, look back on your life the previous 2 weeks and analyse what happened to you on an emotional level which you overcome (like a perceived sense of not being able to defend your territory). For every single illness that happens, there is always, always an emotional trigger – try and you'll see.

So, there we are, as a summary – to get us through what we perceive (and lets face it, it's all about perception), is the 'winter' season, try the following:

- Don't worry about things you cannot control – unnecessary stress – if you can't directly control the outcome – park it! Only 7% of what we worry about, we have any impact on. So what are we doing with the other 93%!!
- Eat as much unprocessed colourful foods as you can find – it need not be expensive – lentils and pulses are an excellent sources of cheap unprocessed food.
- Remember 98% of all illness is caused by stress – all stress is caused by negative emotion. Don't stress about the small stuff.
- And finally, if you do get ill, remember, the body knows its stuff – it's healing and it's nothing to worry about. Just think about the trauma that caused it and know that illness is the body's way of healing.